CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by a browser on a display of a computer, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing access to a program for controlling the Internet browser interface;

(b) using the controlling program to create a library file that is stored on the computer and that defines an interface object; and

(c) causing the library file to open when the browser is activated so as to provide a browser user with access to the defined interface object.

2. A method as recited by claim 1, further comprising the step of:

(d) downloading information to the library file from a predetermined Internet site.

3. A method as recited by claim 1, wherein said step (b) comprises creating a library file on the computer including an ActiveX control that defines an interface object.

4. A method as recited by claim 1, wherein said step (b) comprises creating a library file on the computer including a Plug-in that defines an interface object.

5. A method of dynamically controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by a browser on a display of a computer, a library file being located on a data storage device of the computer and defining an interface object, said method comprising the steps of:

(a)   causing the library file to open when an Internet user activates the browser;

(b)   causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site;

(c)   receiving by the computer in the library file, from the predetermined Internet site, information for the interface object; and

(d)   displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface on the computer display while the browser is activated.

6.   A method as recited by claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

(e)   periodically causing the browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site; and

(f)   receiving by the computer in the library file, from the predetermined Internet site, additional information for the interface object.

7.   A method as recited by claim 5, wherein said step (e) further comprises:

determining if the interface object is displayed along with the Internet browser interface when the Internet user is not connected to the predetermined Internet site; and

if the interface object is not displayed with the Internet browser interface, re-displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface.

8.   A method as recited by claim 5, wherein said step (c) comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

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9.   A method of dynamically controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by a browser on a display of a computer, a library file being located on a data storage device of the computer and defining an interface object, said method comprising the steps of:

(a)   causing the library file to open when an Internet user activates the browser;

(b)   causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site;

(c)   receiving by the computer in the library file, from the predetermined Internet site, information for the interface object;

(d)   displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface on the computer display while the browser is activated; and

(e)   preventing the library file from closing while the browser is activated.

10.   A method as recited by claim 9, further comprising the steps of:

(f)   periodically causing the browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site; and

(g)   receiving by the computer in the library file, from the predetermined Internet site, additional information for the interface object.

11.   A method as recited by claim 9, wherein said step (e) further comprises executing a program loop to prevent the library file from closing.

12.   A method as recited by claim 11, further comprising the step of terminating the program loop when the browser is no longer activated.

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13.   A method as recited by claim 9, wherein said step (c) comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

14.   A method of dynamically controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by a browser on a display of a computer, a library file being located on a data storage device of the computer and defining an interface object, said method comprising the steps of:

(a)   causing the library file to open when an Internet user activates the browser;

(b)   causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site;

(c)   receiving by the computer in the library file, from the predetermined Internet site, information for the interface object;

(d)   causing the browser to create a new browser window;

(e)   preventing the initial browser window from being displayed by the browser; and

(f)   displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface in the new browser window.

15.   A method as recited by claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

(g)   periodically causing the browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site; and

(h)   receiving by the computer in the library file, from the predetermined Internet site, additional information for the interface object.

16. A method as recited by claim 14, wherein said step (c) comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

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17. A method as recited by claim 14, wherein said step (e) further comprises:

identifying a handle for the initial browser window;

hiding and/or disabling the initial browser window;

creating a pointer to control the browser; and

10 creating a new browser window.

18. A method as recited by claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

determining if the browser has opened an additional new browser window; and

if an additional new browser window has been opened, determining whether to add the interface object to the additional new browser window.

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19. A method as recited by claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

determining if the browser has opened an additional new browser window;

if no additional new browser window has been opened, determining whether to close the browser; and

20 if the browser is to be closed, closing all browser windows, including the initial browser window.

20. A method of increasing the frequency with which an Internet user accesses an Internet site using an Internet browser and a computer, said method comprising the steps of:

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(a)   causing the browser to establish a connection to the Internet site when the Internet user activates the browser; and

(b)   receiving, from the Internet site, and storing on the computer, instructions for the browser to periodically re-establish a connection to the Internet site.

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21.   A method as recited by claim 20, further comprising the step of causing the browser to re-establish a connection to the Internet site at a periodic interval and in response to the instructions in the library file.

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22.   A method as recited by claim 21, wherein the periodic interval is determined by the Internet site.

23.   A method as recited by claim 22, wherein the periodic interval is determined by the Internet site and dependent upon Internet user traffic experienced by the Internet site.

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24.   A method as recited by claim 20, wherein said step (a) comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to the Internet site when the user activates the browser, independent of whether the browser is preprogrammed to access a predetermined Internet web site.

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25.   A method of causing an Internet user to access an Internet site using an Internet browser and a computer, said method comprising the steps of:

(a)   providing a library file on the computer including a definition of an interface object and instructions for the browser; and

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(b) upon activation of the browser by the Internet user and in response to the instructions in the library file, automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to an Internet site.

5   26. A method as recited by claim 22, further comprising the step of receiving by the computer in the library file, from the Internet site, information for the interface object.

27. An Internet browser interface displayable by an Internet browser on a computer display and including an ActiveX control interface object that is displayed with the Internet browser interface while the browser is activated and regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the browser.

28. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 27, wherein said ActiveX control interface object causes the Internet browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

29. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 28, wherein said ActiveX control interface object enables the Internet user to customize the interface object.

20   30. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 28, wherein said ActiveX control interface object enables the Internet user to execute a search at the predetermined Internet site.

31. An Internet browser interface displayable by an Internet browser on a
25   computer display and including a Plug-in interface object that is displayed with the Internet

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browser interface while the browser is activated and regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the browser.

32.   An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 31, wherein said Plug-in interface object causes the Internet browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

33.   An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 31, wherein said Plug-in interface object enables the Internet user to customize the interface object.

34.   An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 31, wherein said Plug-in interface object enables the Internet user to execute a search at the predetermined Internet site.

35.   A method for establishing an affinity between an Internet user and a selected Internet web site, said method comprising the steps of:

    (a)   providing to said user, via said selected Internet web site, a control program that permits a user customizable interface object to be created on an interface of a browser used by said user to traverse the Internet; and

    (b)   causing user selected functions to be accessed via said interface object, said functions causing said user to interact with said selected Internet web site.

36.   A method for delivering information to an Internet user from a selected Internet web site, said method comprising the steps of;

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(a)   providing to said user a control program that permits a user customizable interface object to be created on an interface of a browser used by said user to traverse the Internet;

(b)   causing said interface object to continue to exist as said user traverses the Internet from one web site to another web site;

(c)   establishing a link between said selected web site and said interface object through which information may be provided for visual display via said interface object; and

(d)   causing said information to remain visible as said user traverses the Internet from one web site to another web site and after said link between said selected web site and said interface object ceases to exist.

37.   A method for delivering a software program to an Internet user from a selected Internet web site, said method comprising the steps of;

(a)   providing to said user a control program that permits a user customizable interface object to be created on an interface of a browser used by said user to traverse the Internet;

(b)   causing said interface object to continue to exist as said user traverses the Internet from one web site to another web site;

(c)   establishing a link between said selected web site and said interface object through which a software program may be provided via said interface object; and

(d)   causing said software program to be executable as said user traverses the Internet from one web site to another web site and after said link between said selected web site and said interface object ceases to exist.

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38.   A method for delivering information to an Internet user from a selected Internet web site, comprising;

(a)   providing to said user, from said selected web site, a control program

5   that permits a user customizable interface object to be created on an interface of a browser used by said user to traverse the Internet; and

(b)   causing said interface object to continue to exist as said user traverses the Internet to a web site different from said selected web site.

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